



**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
MIDDLETOWN CONNECTICUT
OCTOBER 13, 2016**

The Special meeting of the Common Council of the City of Middletown was held in the Council Chamber of the Municipal Building on Thursday, October 13, 2016 at 7 p.m. meeting

Present

Deputy Mayor Robert P. Santangelo, Councilman Eugene Nocera, Councilman Thomas J. Serra, Councilwoman Mary A. Bartolotta, Councilman Gerald E. Daley, Councilman Robert Blanchard, Councilman Sebastian N. Giuliano, Councilman Philip J. Pessina, Councilwoman Linda Salafia; Sergeant-at-arms Officer and Common Council Clerk Marie O. Norwood.

Absent

Mayor Daniel T. Drew; Councilman Carl R. Chisem, Councilman Grady L. Faulkner, Jr., Councilwoman Deborah Kleckowski, and Corporation Counsel Daniel B. Ryan

Also Present

Seven member of the public

1. Mayor calls meeting to order at 7 p.m.

The Acting Chair calls the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and leads the public in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Clerk reads the call of the meeting; the Acting Chair declares the call a legal call and the meeting a legal meeting.

2. Public Comment Opens

Motion to Waive the Rules

Councilman Serra moves to waive the rules to allow Ms. Greenberg to speak longer than ten minutes as the Council rules state. The Acting Chair calls for the vote and it is unanimous to approve with nine aye votes. Council Members Chisem, Faulkner and Kleckowski are absent.

The Acting Chair opens public comment at 7:04 and asks if there are other speakers besides Ms. Greenberg; he asks that they come forward first.

Chris Carvel, Middletown discusses the Route 9 project. He attended the public meeting when DOT came down and due to his schedule this is the first time he could come to the council to talk about it. He appreciates the Council holding this meeting. He believes in the Route 9 project and the signals are a traffic killer. After looking at the plan he does have concerns. First, he is concerned about the state of the budget. They are laying them off left and right and worried about having the job. He is worried the state will start the project and run out of money. They will be working at the bridge and over by the hospital. It seems like a lot for the city and Main Street to handle. When they get to the infrastructure, he is really concerned about the traffic. He thinks it will be a lot for the city to handle. The other piece not brought up is that as residents when we get hit with a lot of snow, Main Street goes from two lanes to one lane. He is concerned about possible snow as the city got a few years ago. He is worried about this challenge and the demand it will put on the City. They talked about the abutments on Washington Street. At the corner of Washington and Main is already a bottle neck and gets backed up and added in traffic and snow it is ripe for gridlock. He asks the council to explore the idea of putting together a committee or liaison to DOT. The Citizens deserve to be up to date all the time and you should know from DOT that we are on schedule. It will impact all businesses and we will have to address parking, snow and business. It would behoove us to have a committee or designated envoy to DOT. Thank you for your time and holding this meeting

Councilwoman Bartolotta states there will be another meeting with DOT on November 17 at the Elks at 7 p.m.

A. I. Greenberg Presentation

Acting Chair has Ms. Greenberg come forward. She states that she appreciates the opportunity and it is unusual to have a presentation. Middlesex Coalition put out a reference guide called Middletown's Children. We look to improve the lives of children and children of color in Middlesex County and Middletown. Middletown demographics are shifting quickly; also they created a pocket guide for decision

makers as a reference. Some of the information presented in it seems dire, but is meant to share demographic information. We face the same challenges of the State and nation and try to support each and every person. If you go to the website, you can use an interactive version and some data for a town of Middletown's size. They have worked for the last year and a half and she thanks the City and Board of Education as partners to get this down. They used the most recent data available from the three largest population groups in Middletown, White, Black, and Hispanic. Many parents know about the hard choices of bills to pay and 70% of the families earn less than necessary to thrive. The numbers and definitions come from U.S. Stressed out parents affect their children. They heard from families that they trade off meals so children can eat. The cost of living is so high that more of your neighbors than you think are facing these economic challenges. Middletown is a caring community working to effect positive change. Middletown Agencies gave over 30,000 free summer meals and Middletown students show higher extracurricular activities and lower drug use. Single parent homes, 41% live in poverty. There is a hidden group called ALICE families that make too much to qualify for subsidies but can't make it. The cost is between \$45,000 and \$65,297. They can't save or pay off debt. Two in ten families are at this level. The analysis analyzes the resources available to the residents. She goes through the indicators. They looked at the population of the City. Population of Middletown as a whole is very different than a population under 18. Looking at the data, people are concentrated by income due to housing and transportation. People earning less than \$50,000 are concentrated downtown. There are exceptions, but it is a strong trend.

Ms. Greenberg lists the bench marks for income. Poverty line is \$24,250; child support is cut off at \$32,000 and it is closed to new families due to budget problems at the State. Two adults working at minimum wage make less than \$44,955. Federal benefits are cut off by \$45,000. She gives kudos to the YMCA and raised scholarship level to \$70,000. After \$100,000 you thrive as a family in Middletown. She points out that experts state you should not spend more than 30% of your income on housing. 50% of the families in Middletown spend more than 30%. She shows recommended percentages of spending for families. It is no wonder there are so few families in Middletown that can save at the recommended levels. Three in Ten families earn more than \$100,000, but carry school loans. She reads from the guide regarding comments from a family earning over \$100,000. Few jobs pay over \$100,000 and to get to the thriving threshold, both parents have to work and for two children day care costs over \$30,000. She looks at families earning between \$50,000 - \$100,000 which also represents 3 out of ten families in Middletown. 38% of income goes to housing and they have to pay for child care. She reads the perspective of these families. She shows a likely budget for family earning \$65,297. They are probably using home based daycare and not a preschool. Families earning below \$50,000 and this is 4 in ten families. More than half the jobs in CT pay less than \$45,000. She reads a firsthand perspective of these families. She shows the likely budget based on two adults working at minimum wage. They can get housing and childcare subsidies. She shows what Middletown looks like from the rest of the County. The concentration is due to housing and transportation and it is not where the jobs are. Middletown could join regional housing for low to moderate income families. We need to think about jobs. The difference between white and Hispanic families is very large. Many children live below the poverty level. Under employment is lacking for black and Hispanic families. CT has had job loss of higher paid jobs; there are fewer well-paying jobs. Lower wage jobs pay less and offer less flexibility. People of color are feeling this disproportionately. They are under employed compared to white workers. In Middletown, black students receive 41% for out of school suspensions. Middletown is not unique and communities are looking at this more deeply. Early care providers are trying to reduce expulsions and suspensions. They try to keep them in the classroom; they exhibit a variety of inappropriate behaviors. The BOE workforce is 93% and the City workforce is 86% white. This does not represent the children in our community. Middletown High School has improved graduation rates for all students, especially for Hispanic students. White student achievement is more than double Black students.

We have to look at the history of the institutions themselves. There is a group looking at the disparity to find the reason why it occurs. They have recreated ways to help by diverting students from detention, the Juvenile Review Board, etc. There is more to do and she hopes you have the information to help. She is happy to be a resource and happy to answer questions.

Councilman Daley states the slides not in the booklet, can we get them. Ms. Greenberg will get them for the minutes. Website is Middlesex Children.org. Councilman Pessina states it looks like a lot of work was done; were there any solutions that you can bring to us realistically to look at for the future. Ms. Greenberg did not put policy recommendations in this report. Giving you the data was the start. There is a lot we can do. Child care is a serious issue and we have a fantastic school readiness program but there are some things that can happen on the town level. The City can pressure the State for the child care program. As you think about anything about the town and spending money that you come away with looking how to best invest for everyone in the City. As you do that, I wish that you could get an orientation of the demographics of the city and our school children majority are students of color and that is different than 10 or 15 years ago and poverty has brain development problems. There is a lot to consider in how we use money to affect children and families. Councilman Blanchard thanks her and when you become a newly elected official, this was enlightening. If you could send us the policy proposals; we don't get to hear this and we should bring some of these statistics down and we should collaborate.

Councilman Nocera thanks and congratulates her on the presentation. Our schools have been affected dramatically by the demographic change and they do a good job, but I think in stage 3 when you look at the difference in demographics between adults and children it brings a number of issues to the schools and communities and people don't see the back of the problem. The number of students coming to

school hungry for example is one in three. Ms. Greenberg responds it is a window in what the community will look like ten years from now. If 30% can't achieve, what does that mean for Middletown and its economy. It has to be a community response. Councilman Serra states great job; he likes the improvements made. Along with the request, which parts of all this are successful and where we can help with dollars. There is some success with some of the percentages and this council has backed the educational system. I would like to see which programs are more successful and we could help you there. Ms. Greenberg replies preventative programs are the money savers. Preschool expulsion, a lot get suspended and expelled. We are working on that and have had great success and the programs they implemented work with the parent and child together looking at the issues that would prevent the child to succeed. Councilwoman Bartolotta states they fought for funding for Bielefield School. Ms. Greenberg states there was funding from the State on this. Councilman Giuliano thanks Ms. Greenberg; one of the last things you said was about innovation to fashion solutions; what I have noticed if we are innovative, there are bureaucratic and administrative constraints put on us. How much of your research has run into those types of roadblocks and what can we do to eliminate them. Ms. Greenberg states they lose funding for some good programs and at the State they are on the chopping block first. People are thinking about cutting dollars right now and if it is a preventative program to save money in ten years, that is part of the problem. How do we set some of these successful programs permanent and not susceptible to budget problems? It is hard to be innovative in big systems. We should try other things, but how do you implement them. Councilman Giuliano states when you have a top down solution for everything, it stifles that. Ms. Greenberg replies School readiness and the Youth Service Bureau are small enough to be innovative. Councilman Giuliano states I am glad you pointed Justin out and he has been the driving force behind some of these programs. Bias is unconscious in the classrooms by teachers. How do we deal with that? Ms. Greenberg states that is where creative thinking comes in play.

Acting Chair Santangelo states he is glad you came and Bob Dylan got the Nobel Peace prize and he wrote "times they are a changing." You pointed out about the brains and what happens to children and development with early trauma and abuse. He discusses how he has seen adults in his program and why we would expect them to be normal. They are different and it is hard for someone who sees this. There is a lot of work for the future. Ms. Greenberg comments for kids living in an unstable environment, you are always paying attention to be safe and that takes away focus; it doesn't help you in school, but it is good for life. We need to look at the response of children and use trauma based approaches. Acting chair Santangelo states the other part of it is how much of this can be given to the experts in trauma. Councilwoman Bartolotta states she wanted to address a statement about what we can do as elected officials when we make decisions. She was not aware of it and became aware of it when they were invited into a school and met individuals that were part of the program and it enlightened me to pick up the phone to call my State Senator and Rep to save the program. There are multiple layers and they become black and white if we don't know the back story. We need your advocacy to help us and we need to hold elected officials accountable for bad decisions and we can do that by working together. Councilman Nocera states what is working out there; one of the things he is proud to point out in 2008 we realized it was a disproportionate number of students of color being suspended and expelled. We set up to do something and the result of that effort; we saw the graduation rate improve. That was a focused approach and required resources to divert to assist students and keep them in the class room.

Ms. Greenberg states it is possible to make changes. From the time children are in the womb, the achievement gap has started. It has to do with the care they get and as a community need to look at the whole picture. Councilwoman Bartolotta states money doesn't solve the problem. You have to figure out what works and what doesn't. Ms. Greenberg responds we were discussing that we want fewer kids sent to court, but it is money being diverted from the courts into the community. We need the money recaptured at the local level. It works here and the money is needed here and shouldn't go back to the general fund.

The Acting Chair thanks Ms. Greenberg and asks if there are any additional speakers. Seeing none, he asks for a motion to adjourn.

3. Public Comment Closes

4. Meeting adjourned

Councilman Serra moves to adjourn and is seconded by Councilman Giuliano. The vote is called and it is unanimous with nine aye votes to adjourn. The Acting Chair adjourns the meeting at 8:03 p.m.

ATTEST:

**MARIE O. NORWOOD
COMMON COUNCIL CLERK**